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The Gospel in a nutshell

Seven aspects of the Gospel of grace

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

John 3:16

This well-known Bible verse is actually a concise summary of the truth of the Gospel. We find here no less than seven aspects of the Good News:

(1) First, the important truth about God Himself, i.e., the greatest Person in heaven and on earth. He is presented here as the One Who acts, gives, and loves. He stands at the beginning of all things, the beginning of creation, the beginning of the world of man. After all, man is created in His image and likeness. But God is also the Origin of our salvation, of redemption, of the new creation. He is the First and the Last, the Eternal God of the universe, the Alpha and the Omega.

(2) Next we see God's great and unparalleled love. This is the greatest conceivable devotion and self-sacrifice found in the universe. The love of God can be compared to nothing. It is a completely selfless love and surrender, which has been revealed to us in Christ. In Him we see that God is light, and that He is love. This is also the theme of John in his first letter (1 John 1:5; 4:8, 16). Light and love are always in balance with God. His holiness and justice are not in conflict with His love, His grace, His mercy and compassion.

(3) Then we see the object of this divine love, namely "the world". That is the entire human world, the greatest number of people imaginable, and there are billions of them! God's love applies to all people, all humankind, but not to the evil, hostile world system controlled by Satan, the "ruler of this world" (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; Eph. 6:12). This system came into being after the Flood and the introduction

of idolatry at the construction of the tower of Babel, and it has been opposed to the one, true God ever since.

The message and the ministry of reconciliation always applies to human individuals, although Israel as the people of God has a special place in the offer of God's grace. The proclamation of the Gospel applies first to the Jew, and then to the Greek (Rom. 1:16). So God in Christ reached out to the world of men (and He still does), but not to the world as the system of Satan (He never did). Therefore, in this respect the commandment, "Do not love the world or the things in the world," applies to us as Christians (1 John 2:15). The ministry of reconciliation includes the ministry of the apostles (2 Cor. 5), and the many centuries in which the Good News resounds in this world.

(4) Then we see that God is a *giving* God. It is about the most unique act imaginable, in which His great love was expressed. God's gift was an act of love with tremendous consequences for us and for all creation, and that into the far future. God is the great Giver. Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift (2 Cor. 9:15). This is now also the standard for our life as Christians: it is about giving and serving love. The cross is the ultimate proof of that.

(5) What has God given to us? It is the greatest imaginable gift, the most precious thing God possessed: His only begotten Son. The word "only begotten" has the meaning of "unique" (cf. Gen. 22:2). It is His own Son, the Son of the Father's love (Acts 20:28; Col. 1:13). God did not even spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all (Rom. 8:32).

(6) For whom is this gift of love intended, and on what condition can we partake in it? It is the most attractive condition imaginable, namely a sincere faith in God's great work of salvation. Our good works cannot save us, but by looking at the cross of Christ there is life and salvation. Salvation is by virtue of faith in the Crucified One, in His finished work and His resurrection from the dead.

(7) And what is the glorious result of our trust and faith in the Savior of the world? It is the greatest conceivable favor on the part of God toward lost, sinful man, and it is that we should not perish but have everlasting life! On the one hand, this means that we are saved from the lake of fire and the never-ending destruction in the outer darkness.

On the other hand, it means an awesome future prospect for all those who believe. The possession of everlasting life is the most glorious result of salvation that we can think about. For this is eternal life, that we may know the Father Himself and the Son, to be in God's presence and to worship Him (cf. John 17:3). It is living in the

atmosphere of God's eternal glory. Eternal life is already now the portion of the believer who has the Holy Spirit indwelling (1 John 5:13). Such a person has passed from death into life (John 5:24).

